

# ARTICLES OF FAITH

by

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Part I

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## FUNDAMENTALISM AND TOLERANCE

This past October, 2008, a noteworthy event took place at the Vatican. According to sources in Rome, Pope Benedict and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople issued a joint statement on "Fundamentalism" and intolerance. Our readers will notice that we placed Fundamentalism in quotation marks. The reason for this is obvious: what could these two eminent men of the cloth possibly mean by this word? (They did not offer a definition anywhere.)

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* says the following:

A form of Protestant Christianity that upholds belief in the strict and literal interpretation of the Bible, including its narratives, doctrines, prophecies, and moral laws.

Modern Christian fundamentalism arose from American millenarian sects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has become associated with reaction against social and political liberalism and rejection of the theory of evolution. Islamic fundamentalism appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as a reaction to the disintegration of Islamic political and economic power, asserting that Islam is central to both state and society and advocating strict adherence to the Koran (*Qur'an*) and to Islamic law (sharia), supported if need be by jihad or holy war.

We see that, for a variety of reasons, the *Oxford American Dictionary* did not name Orthodox Christianity in its definition of "fundamentalism."

The matter of intolerance is another issue that we need to examine briefly. As we know, Roman Catholicism has quite a few skeletons in its closet as regards this subject. However, what caught our attention in this recent meeting at the Vatican was Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's participation, and his condemnation of intolerance.

Patriarch Bartholomew is known also as "The Green Patriarch" (and, in some church circles, because of his persecution of Orthodox Christians who disagree with his church policies, he is referred to as "The *Venomous* Green Patriarch"). His harassment and persecution of those who do not agree with him — for example, the monastic brotherhood of Esphigmenou Monastery on Mt. Athos — has earned him the opprobrium of believing and practicing Christians throughout the world. That such a man should issue a statement condemning "intolerance" constitutes the height of irony. It is as

though the Sisterhood of New Orleans Prostitutes were to lecture us on chastity, or the Brotherhood of Taliban Assassins were to condemn bloodshed!

Speaking of "fundamentalism," one of the most fundamental Christian teachings is: "Whosoever *willeth* to come after Me, let him take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). The operative word is "willeth." Christianity is a purely voluntary faith. Coercion, pressure, bribes, force, threats are forbidden when one wishes to convert another to the Christian faith. You come to Christianity of your own will, moved to do so because of the desire of your heart and the understanding of your mind.

So when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew — and the other leaders and bishops of the State Churches of "World Orthodoxy" — attempt to silence and crush any faithful Orthodox Christians who object to their policies, and with the armed force of their respective "Orthodox" (there are those quotation marks again) nations threaten all "dissidents," and, at the same time, speak to us about love, brotherhood, and tolerance, while condemning "fundamentalism," then another fundamental teaching of the Christian faith comes to mind:

"Physician, heal thyself!"

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## **OUR PARALLEL UNIVERSE**

Or

Heads, I Win; Tails, You Lose

Some physicists balk at the idea of "The Big Bang," the theory most accepted among scientists explaining how our universe began. The Big Bang Theory, say its supporters, tells us that some 15 billion years ago, give or take a decade or two, our universe began with a huge explosion — the "Big Bang" — and suddenly, in an instant, where there had been nothing — absolutely nothing, no time, no space, not even an atom — there was this tiny, but very rapidly-expanding universe. Finally, as its gases began to cool and coalesce, it began to form the elements, galaxies, stars, planets, etc., and — voilà! — we have what we have now.

As mentioned above, some physicists do not like this idea at all. In fact, they find it "preposterous," "incredible," "repugnant". Why? The Big

Bang gives them the heebie-jeebies because it sounds too much like the Book of Genesis! The idea is troubling to them because, if true, it would imply "a moment of creation" in which everything, including the universe and its laws, came into existence out of nothing. Scientists call this moment of creation a "singularity," and nothing can be known about what existed before this moment, simply because there was no "before." It is outside of the laws of physics, because there were no laws of physics. Numerous lines of evidence, they say, have now converged and confirmed the Big Bang Theory, and have discredited the previously-held "steady state theory" of the universe — the thought, that is, that the universe had always existed and had no beginning. Given the fact that science is always moving along, all these ideas may sound very quaint in a couple of generations, but for now, these are the predominant theories at the moment.

Nevertheless, for many physicists — especially atheists — the Big Bang Theory is bad news. As astronomer Robert Jastrow, who is an agnostic, puts it, "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak. As he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

So, atheist scientists have resorted to proposing other theories. "The universe is just there, and that's all there is to it," say some. This is not very satisfactory, or convincing, for most people, as might be expected. So, now what?

"Maybe," say others, "there are other parallel universes, with different laws, different dimensions, and different luminaries — something that we cannot even comprehend or visualize." Of course, their opponents ask them for evidence of these parallel universes. "There is no evidence," is the response. "This is just our conjecture. We believe these parallel universes might exist. In fact, they might even be right here, right next to us, here where we are speaking, and we can't detect them, because their existence is so different from our concept of existence." To this, one could well respond: "Just a moment, my friend. Not so fast."

### **Two Can Play This Game**

If some physicists can claim that another parallel universe is right here next to ours, and they cannot prove its existence because its "laws of nature" are so different from ours, and its dimensions, and luminaries, and everything is different from what we can know or perceive, then we

have crossed over from science into metaphysics, and two can play that game. We also, therefore, would like to propose the existence of a parallel universe, and we want to give that universe a name as well. We think it should be called "The Heavenly Kingdom." How about that? Some may say that we cannot prove its existence, but neither can they prove the existence of their parallel universe. At least, our parallel universe has the advantage of having millions of saints in it, and they criss-cross, back and forth, between our two universes all the time, helping us out over here. We even have greeting cards from our other universe — we call them "holy icons" — with the message, "Wish you were here!"

So, which option do you atheist physicists prefer? A universe created instantly out of nothing —as it says in the Book of Genesis — or a parallel universe called The Heavenly Kingdom —as described in the New Testament? Take your pick, because, either way, it's "Heads, I win; tails, you lose."

Note: Information for this article came from the book, *What's So Great About Christianity*, by Dinesh D'Souza.

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### **THE SEAL OF THE ANTICHRIST**

About ten years ago, during a trip to Greece, I was told a story in three slightly different versions, on three separate occasions, in different locations. As best as I can remember, it ran as follows:

A Greek man had travelled to Greece from America, and was visiting Docheiariou Monastery on the Holy Mountain, Athos. During his visit, he was about to enter the monastery's main church, the Catholicon, when he discovered, much to his consternation, that he could not make the sign of the Cross. No matter how much he tried, he could not do it. Finally, weeping with dismay and frustration, he collapsed at the entrance of the church. This matter was reported forthwith to the abbot, who rushed to the side of the stricken man, and asked him what was wrong. The ailing man explained to the abbot that, when about to enter the church, he found that he could not make the sign of the Precious Cross, no matter how hard he tried. Then the abbot solemnly asked him, "My son, where are you from?" "From America," answered the man. "Did

you, by any chance, fly to Athens through Kennedy Airport?" asked the abbot. The man answered in the affirmative. "Then you should know, my son, that when you handed over your passport to be checked at Kennedy Airport, your right hand was secretly sealed with the seal of the Antichrist, and that is why you cannot make the sign of the Cross now."

When I first heard this story, several questions came to my mind right away. First of all, the abbot pointed out that the man was "secretly sealed" with the sign of the Antichrist when he handed over his passport. If he was sealed "secretly," then how did the abbot know about it? How did *anyone* know about it, if it was a secret?

Second, when I asked for the name of this Greek-American gentleman who had gone through Kennedy Airport, nobody could tell me what it was. Neither did anybody know where the man lived in America.

The second time I heard this story, all the details were essentially the same, except that instead of Docheiariou Monastery, it was Dionysiou Monastery on Mt. Athos. Thus, evidently, the abbot of Dionysiou also knew about this "secret" seal at Kennedy Airport's passport control.

The third time I heard the same story again, all the details were identical, but this time it was Gregoriou Monastery on Mt. Athos. So, the abbot of Gregoriou was also privy to what was going on at passport control at Kennedy.

And, of course, nobody knew the man's name or where he lived in America.

An unverifiable story — also known as an "urban legend."

In other variants heard later by others, the man had to have his hand severed in order to be able again to make the sign of the Cross and thus be saved.

Needless to say, neither I, nor any of my friends or colleagues, nor, to my knowledge, any of the thousands of Orthodox Christians who have gone through Kennedy Airport, have had any trouble making the sign of the Cross.

Then, there was the time when His Eminence, Metropolitan Makarios of Toronto and I went shopping at a supermarket in the Halándri suburb of Athens. After we got the items we needed, we came to the check-out line

to pay for the articles. The young woman at the cash-register saw us in our rassa (but she had also overheard us speaking to one another in English), so she asked us if we were Orthodox. When we said yes, she asked us, "What do you think about the bar-code they're putting on all the items now? Do you think we're renouncing Christ and worshipping the Antichrist, if we purchase these items? That's what everybody is saying nowadays."

Metropolitan Makarios gave her a very succinct answer. "Tell me," he said, "Who do you think is mightier, Christ or the Antichrist?"

"Well, Christ is mightier, of course," she responded.

"All right then, if you're an Orthodox Christian, then you are **already sealed by Christ**, in your Holy Baptism, your Holy Chrismation, and in Holy Communion, by the Body and Blood of Christ. Unless you voluntarily and consciously deny Christ and thereby receive the true seal of Antichrist (whatever that is), you have nothing to fear." First of all, no one has proven to us in a convincing way that bar codes (or microchips, or any such devices) are the seal of the Antichrist. Even if the number 666 is included in these devices, that number, of itself, has not been copyrighted by the Antichrist; it can be found in countless numbers of books, and even on our license plates, and for years — nay, centuries — nobody ever avoided these numerals as if they were the long-expected "seal."

Secondly, even if one did mistakenly and involuntarily receive these automated "seals" (like our mythic Greek-American at Kennedy Airport), has he automatically lost his free will also? Is there no possibility for repentance? Cannot he correct his inadvertent mistake? Is this person "pre-destined" to eternal damnation, no matter how much he desires or strives to be saved?

What nonsense!

Where did these crypto-Augustinian, crypto-Calvinistic teachings come from?

One father from the Holy Mountain let the cat out of the bag. He said, "All the best books and tapes about the Antichrist come from America." That is to say, the best books and tapes about the Antichrist originate from *Fundamentalist Protestant groups* in America and are translated into the languages of our Orthodox people.

The real problem is that practically nobody reads the Lives of the



Saints and the commentaries of the Holy Fathers on the Scriptures, and so, for the most part, both the clergy and the laity are uninstructed in matters of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. So, what happens? They wind up reading materials that are written by "modern" theologians, or even by non-Orthodox writers, and their brains get all jumbled up. They *think* they are Orthodox, but they have just learned material that has been either directly prepared by heretical writers, or heavily influenced by them. And just because it's in the language of our Orthodox people (whether that language is Greek, Russian, Romanian, or whatever), they *think* it's Orthodox, but it is not.

So, to conclude: if you are an Orthodox Christian, you have *already been sealed by Christ* in your Baptism, your Chrismation, and every time you receive the precious Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Since you are already sealed by Christ, and since our Saviour, the Destroyer of death, is mightier than Antichrist, no bar code, no microchip, or any such other claptrap nonsense, can force you involuntarily to renounce Christ.

However, if you believe that the seal of the Antichrist is stronger than the seal of Christ, and that, even if you receive it involuntarily and unawares you are nonetheless damned, then, my friend, ***you have already renounced the Christian faith.***

In one generation, Protestants have become impotent as a moral force here in America, but, what is sad is that, through the translations of their Calvinistic books, they seem to be picking up disciples in "Orthodox" countries, where people who have not learned their own faith are becoming obsessed with mythologies about the Antichrist.

Truly [in a bad sense], as the Prophet Esaias says, "Zeal shall lay hold of an untaught people" [Es. 26:11].

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## **ON FASTING**

From the Introduction of issue #42 of *The True Vine*

His Grace, Bishop Demetrius wrote the following about one of his recent trips to Guatemala:

In February of 2008, the St. Paul's Fellowship of Labor

travelled to Guatemala for a week's visit. This trip coincided with the feast day of St. Xenia of Petersburg, the patron saint of our mission there. During the week, children from a nearby school passed by the church daily and stared at the Fellowship workers and the work being done. On the Sunday that followed, three of the children came to church for Liturgy. Ever since that Sunday, they have refused to go to the Roman Catholic church that their mother attends, and they are presently attending our church faithfully.

Last October, I went as well and found these same three children in church all dressed in white and waiting to be baptized (we had another baptism that day). I told them that I could not baptize them until I met at least one of their parents and had the consent of both parents. The mother came to the church and said that the children really wanted to be baptized in our church, and that both she and her husband had no problem with that. I felt that we should still wait a while before going ahead with this, so I told the mother that, for now, the children should try to fast from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. She laughed and said, "Meat?" At that point it was explained to me that, because of their poverty, these people hardly ever eat any meat at all. The same occurred with another family that wanted to become Orthodox and were told that they should refrain from meat on fast days.

Such is the state of *billions* of people on our planet. While most of us who live in North America and Europe will find this simply incomprehensible, hunger and want are the bitter reality for the vast majority of the Earth's inhabitants.

One may ask: "What can I do about it? I'm just one person."

The answer: "Fast!"

As this issue of *The True Vine* will demonstrate, the Church's traditional understanding of fasting and abstinence is the solution for many of the world's problems in both the material and the spiritual realms. Since all of us, without exception, are a combination of body and soul, we know from experience that these two components of our human nature interact and influence one another in marvelous and mysterious ways. Self-restraint can work wonders, both for each of us individually and for society in general. It is the mother of self-respect, the basis of civilization, the firm foundation of happy marriages, the begetter of grateful and respectful children, and the establishment of safe neighborhoods where everyone can live in peace and

security with their windows and doors unlocked.

Such are but a few of the boons of self-restraint.

Alas, however, we know that this is not the current state of affairs, chiefly because few of us have learned to practice the virtue of restraining our harmful passions, nor have we tapped into the secret source of that godly and invincible strength that was given to the Saints as a reward for their being good stewards of their senses: divine grace.

Again, fasting and abstinence are the *first* steps toward this blessed goal.

This is why we have dedicated this issue to this vital subject. This is why St. Seraphim of Sarov, one of the greatest men of God to arise in the recent centuries, can say: "Before all else, ensure that the one whom you choose as your companion for life keeps the fasts. If they do not keep the fasts, then they are not Christians, whatever, they may consider themselves to be."

Profound words with profound implications.

People who observe the holy fasts will also be more likely to be better and more responsible individuals in other matters as well: people aware of their shortcomings, but willing to struggle to overcome them.

To state our case in words that every Orthodox Christian can understand: people that struggle against their passions will draw God's grace to themselves.

This issue of *The True Vine* will help us understand fasting's varied history in the Church, and its true purpose.

We will learn also of the many variant forms of fasting. In this particular instance, St. John Chrysostom's words are most appropriate:

Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the unskillfulness of him who employs it. For it is necessary to know, moreover, the time when it should be applied, and the requisite quantity of it; and the nature of the country, and the season of the year; and the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. Now if, when the body needs healing, such exactness is required on our part,

much more ought we, when our care is about the soul, and we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, to look, and to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy.

*(On the Statues 3:8)*

With this important advice in mind, let us proceed with discernment.

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## **FRIENDS FOREVER**

Recently, someone wrote me the following note:

My 19 year old son asked me a very good question. He is struggling with the fact that God created us, knowing that many people will go to hell. He is having a hard time thinking this is what a loving God would do. I spoke with him about free will, but was not able to explain this to his satisfaction. Do you have anything to point to that will help me explain this well? He is tired of hearing "well, we do not know", or, "it is beyond our understanding..." etc.

My response:

Perhaps I should begin by throwing both you and your son into confusion and consternation. We are *all* going to wind up in God's loving embrace! No, I am not an Origenist. Do you have the article "The River of Fire," by Alexander Kalomiros?\*. If you read that article, you will see that all us, indeed, will be in God's embrace, but for some, that loving of embrace will be a repugnant experience. Some will hate God and everything about Him, and they will struggle to be free of His embrace and His love and grace, but there will be nowhere else to go. He will be everywhere, and, for those who hate Him, it will be a claustrophobic, smothering and miserable experience. Imagine: trying, unsuccessfully, to get away from somebody you loathe. Forever. Heaven and Hell are not actually a "place," but our inner reaction to God's all-encompassing grace. Why does each man react differently to that one divine grace? The answer to that can be found only inside a man's soul. Why would anyone feel repugnance toward God? Why would anyone hate God forever? The

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\*Available from St. Nectarios American Orthodox Church, Seattle, WA

answer to that question, in turn, may be: if you have befriended the demons throughout your life, they will continue to be your friends forever. If you have befriended the angels throughout your life, they will continue to be your friends forever. The choice of our friends is ours, not God's.

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## **A MUD PIE**

With A Squeak In It

If one picks up a copy of the local newspaper, or *Time*, or *Newsweek*, or flips on the television and watches the news, or some film, one will see an endless parade of personalities, world leaders, movie stars, popular singers, prominent religious men, etc. Each one will say what he or she has to say. People will watch each one with varying degrees of attention for a moment of time, until something more interesting catches their eye. The parade continues, of course, and more interesting groups and individuals troop past the spectators. Eventually, like all parades, the end comes, and the spectators dissipate.

What was the point?

Or, to put it another way, did we gain anything of lasting value by watching the parade? Lasting value? Does anyone expect to gain something of lasting value from a parade? Indeed, when we say "lasting value," what do we mean? Five years? Twenty years? A thousand years? Eternity? People will probably disagree among themselves even about the term "lasting value."

But to come back to the original question: What was the point of the parade? Of course, the real answer is that there was no point, except perhaps, to entertain or distract us for a few moments. Or, if it was a military parade, to impress us. But, intrinsically, a parade — no matter what type of parade it is — has no real, lasting value, since it both begins and ends in the middle of nowhere.

Some of us, unfortunately, seem to feel the same about our own lives. Or, if we do not feel that way, we certainly act as though our lives had no intrinsic value.

Indeed, in this world, our time is brief and, apparently, meaningless. We seem to be only a part of a parade. Pointless. Of negligible value.

This type of thinking has led some people into despair or even complete unbelief. "Oh, what's the point of it all?" some cry, as they jump off the Golden Gate Bridge, or throw themselves into a profligate way of life. Since man is nothing but an insignificant speck in the meaningless march of time, in this pointless parade that we see before us every day on the media, they think, what is the difference between trying to do something "worthwhile," or going out into the mall and shooting everyone in sight with a machine gun? Who cares if you are Frankenstein's monster or St. Nectarius of Pentapolis?

What confuses some people is that, from a healthy, good, Christian point of view, this type of thinking is partly true! As mortal humans, we *are* insignificant. As humble creatures of God, it is true, we do not differ — in our creaturehood — from an ant, or a cockroach. We are born, we live, we die, and hardly anybody notices. Or, as one of our spiritual fathers well described our human condition: "Man is nothing but a mud pie with a squeak in it." How true. And if you squeak better than others, they call you an orator, or an opera star, and they throw roses at you, and give you standing ovations. But, as time goes by, the squeak gets weaker, and then it is gone. What happens then? The mud pie dries out and crumbles back into the earth from which it was taken. So, indeed, from that point of view, it is good for us to remember that we are nothing but little mud pies that squeak.

But our squeak is not like other squeaks.

This is what St. Seraphim of Sarov has to say about our squeak:

Many explain that when it says in the Bible, "God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam the first created, — who was created by Him from the dust of the ground," it must mean that until then there was neither human soul nor spirit in Adam, but only the flesh created from the dust of the ground. This interpretation is wrong, for the Lord created Adam from the dust of the ground with the constitution which our dear little father, the holy Apostle Paul describes: "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 5:23). And all these parts of our nature were created from the dust of the ground, and Adam was not created dead, but an active being like all the other animate creatures of God living on earth. The point is that if the Lord God had not breathed afterwards into his face this breath of life (i.e., the grace of our Lord God the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the

Father and rests in the Son, and is sent into the world for the Son's sake), Adam would have remained without having within him the Holy Spirit Who raises him to Godlike dignity. *However perfect he had been created and superior to all the other creatures of God, as the crown of creation on earth, he would have been just like all the other creatures, which though they have a body, soul and spirit, each according to its kind, yet have not the Holy Spirit within them.* But when the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then, according to Moses' word, Adam became a living soul (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every way like God, and, like Him, forever immortal.

*(Conversation with Motovilov)*

So, according to St. Seraphim of Sarov and the saints of our Church, our squeak is a very special squeak. Unlike parades, we, by grace divine, are of lasting value.

Though we still are only mud-pies, our God-given squeak changes the whole picture — especially when we squeak in unison with the Saints.

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## **OUR FATHERS IN HEAVEN**

*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers.*

*(I Cor. 4:15)*

Who is a Church Father? The question arises time and again. It is important because we quote "the Church Fathers" as authorities for what we believe as Orthodox Christians. Then, too, there are those who disdainfully dismiss the Church Fathers, because, they say, one "Father" contradicts the other, and the so-called "Fathers of the Church" do not agree among themselves.

But is this true?

Before we so readily dismiss them, it might be a good idea if we checked to see if the Church has a criterion for determining who a Church Father is.

One good place to begin is the *Menaia* — the Church service books for every month of the year. Is there a service for him in the *Menaion*? That is a sure indication that he, at least, is a saint in the Church. For example,

in my reading, I sometimes come across the expression "Saint Clement of Alexandria." And I ask myself, "Saint?" Now, where did *that* come from? I look in the *Menaion*. No Saint Clement of Alexandria anywhere. I look in the *Great Synaxarion of the Lives of the Saints*. Nothing.

Well, as a matter of fact, it turns out that he is not a saint after all. He was a kindly and erudite old man who wrote a lot of fine things about the Christian faith and passed away in the beginning of the third century. But he was also a bit too impressed by Greek philosophy, and so, the Church, although it admires his writings for the most part, nonetheless does not consider him a saint. One of his students was Origen, who, like his teacher, had an exceptionally brilliant mind, and wrote many fine things, but alas, some very wrong things, about the Christian faith — so wrong, in fact, that he was finally condemned for heresy by an Ecumenical Council. Yet, Origen is often quoted by some unknowing persons as a "Church Father" also, despite the fact that he was condemned for heresy by the Church. Now, that is certainly a contradiction!

Needless to say, there is no *Menaion* service for Origen. So, despite what some may claim to the contrary, he is most emphatically not a Church Father.

The same is true for Augustine. Although he must be admired for his repentance from his former way of life and his erudition, yet, like Origen, Greek philosophy and his personal speculations got the better of him.

It was Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain who, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, entered Augustine's name into the list of saints on the date of June 15<sup>th</sup>. But Saint Nicodemus also noted that he was amazed at how many doctrinal errors there were in Augustine's writings. He surmised — wrongly, as it turns out — that "later Latin writers" had interpolated all those errors into Augustine's writings. Alas, such was not the case. In this case, if not in many others, the "later Latin writers" are innocent.

Perhaps the best definition of Augustine's status in the Orthodox Church can be found in William Gardner's book, *Notes of a Visit to the Russian Church*, published in London in 1882.

During a visit to the then Archimandrite (and later bishop) Ignatiy Brianchaninoff, Gardener had the following comments:

Speaking of Cassian, [the saintly Abbot Ignatiy] remarked: "You in the West, say, 'Saint Augustine,' but only 'Blessed Cassian,'



whereas we, on the contrary, say 'Saint Cassian,' but only 'Blessed Augustine'.... Augustine had more genius, eloquence, and learning than asceticism, and was a good deal of a disciple of Origen. The works of Origen are regarded by the Easterns as heretical; and Origen himself as all but a heretic; while the West has been very tender towards him....Augustine speaks very strongly of Predestination, which the Greeks have made to depend on foreknowledge; and we cannot but observe that both Luther and Calvin, though no doubt they misunderstood him, professed to follow Augustine as their teacher."

In other words, Augustine is admired for his devotion and erudition, but because of the many, many errors in his writings — in fact, virtually all of the errors of the West can be laid at his feet — he was mostly unknown and ignored, and certainly not an authority for the Orthodox Christian Church. Even in the West, he received whatever prominence he achieved primarily because of the political and theological policies of Charlemagne (+814). The most educated churchman of his time in the East — Saint Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople (+891) — was completely unfamiliar with Augustine's writings.

In her remarkable book, *Byzantium — The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, Judith Herrin, a Roman Catholic scholar at Oxford, candidly admits that, throughout the Middle Ages in the West, Augustine was known as "the *founding father* of the western Church" (p. 40).

If only some people today could grasp the full significance of that statement!

So, now we return to our original question: Who is a Church Father?

As Father Michael Azkoul writes, "The historic Orthodox Church honors the Fathers as 'teachers of the Faith' *par excellence*. We receive their witness with obedient reverence....Who is a 'church father'? Who is it that the Church recognizes as speaking for her?....The title "father" is given to those teachers of the Faithful and defenders of the Christian Revelation who came after the Apostles, that is, those whom God has chosen in every generation to explain and preserve His Gospel 'once delivered to the saints' (Jude 3)....Gradually, [the term 'Father'] came to include Christian writers — usually bishops, sometimes monks, rarely laymen — who *in no fundamental way depart from the Apostolic Tradition in faith or piety*...

"[The Fathers] shared a common Faith which they applied according to need and circumstance. Thus, what sometimes appears to be opposition between them — the diversity of religious formulations, the

terminological differences, the *theologoumena* (pious inferences from the Christian Truth), the variety of problems which they addressed — do not imply contradiction of one another or the Faith they received, guarded and explained."\*

That is also why we say that we follow "the consensus of the Fathers." We do not, for example, follow one Father, to the exclusion of the others. We do not call ourselves "Basilians," or "Chrysostomites," or "Palamites" as others call themselves "Lutherans," or "Calvinists."

What is the basis of a Church Father's authority? Why do we call them "God-bearing" and "God-inspired"? Father John Romanides writes the following in *An Outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics* (p. 41):

In their defense of infallibility, the Papal theologians claim that a successor of the Apostles could also be infallible and God-inspired. The case, however, of Peter and of the other Apostles, who were present at the Transfiguration and at Pentecost, is quite different, because it rests on the fact that they received deification when they saw the glory of Christ and became eyewitnesses of his Godhead. As a consequence, their doctrine on the Trinity and on God is infallible, *because they had had a direct experience of the Glory of the Godhead of Christ* [emphasis mine], which made them infallible Apostles of the truth of his Godhead, of the Trinity, of Grace, of the Church, etc. In contrast to the Apostles, the Popes, who teach heresies, cannot possibly claim infallibility for themselves. From the Orthodox perspective, the Popes could only be true successors of Peter *if they participate in the same deification as he did* [ditto]. For the Orthodox, divine inspiration and infallibility belong to those who receive the revelation. In the Old Testament, they are called Patriarchs and Prophets, and in the New Testament, Apostles. In the Church, they are called Saints and Fathers, who share in the same experience with the above and, therefore, this teaching is the same with that of Holy Scripture, and they rightly became interpreters of it.

Many prominent Church writers of antiquity have no place in the Church's service books, as we have noted, and hence, they are not Saints or Fathers of the Church. Again, as Father Michael Azkoul notes:

If such writers had not simply apostatized, if they were not anathematized by Church councils, they were deprived of

any ecclesial privilege because of their doctrinal errors, which were too many and too serious, for too long, or they lacked the piety which Orthodoxy expects of her spokesmen. Some of what these theologians have written is profound and useful, but they nonetheless speak for themselves, not for the Church, since their opinions derive from personal experience.\*

Saint Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (+461), writes that God raises up "reverent witnesses to the one Faith which justifies the saints of all ages," "the Faith which is no discovery of earthly wisdom...but rather what was taught by the Only-begotten Son Himself, and established by the Holy Spirit" (*Serm. LXXCII*, 6; PL 52:415A).

And finally, "it is the Church herself who determines which among those 'witnesses' are her spokesmen, not the heterodox and the unbeliever with their own biases" (*ibid*, p. 13).

The *true* Fathers of the Church are, as Saint Leo the Great tells us, the "reverent witnesses to the one Faith."

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### **SHEOL DELENDA EST!**

Or

The Fierce Man of War Strikes Again

"Oh no, here we go again," groaned the senators. They were complaining because old Cato had raised his hand, indicating he wanted to speak. The Roman senators had learned by now what to expect every time Cato took the floor. No matter what the subject was, no matter who or what the issue of discussion, Cato always began his speeches with exactly the same words. Some senators were convinced that he had a one-

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\**An Orthodox Patrology*, Father Michael Azkoul, St. Louis, MO, p. 12-16 (unpublished).

\*Father Michael Azkoul notes further, if you eliminate from the patristic rolls Augustine, Origen and Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Tatian, Eusebius of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, Evagrius Ponticus, and such others who have never received the Church's accolade, the charge of "contradiction" between the Fathers quickly loses validity. See *Once Delivered to the Saints*, Father Michael Azkoul, St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, WA, p. 14.

track mind and was obsessed. And, sure enough, he did not disappoint his colleagues. "Cartago delenda est!" shouted the old legislator, as always, and then he launched into what was the current subject of discussion before the Senate that day. Often, he ended his speeches with the very same expression!

"Carthage must be destroyed!" was Cato's slogan, preoccupation and obsession. He was convinced that if the Roman State was to grow and prosper, and exert its influence over the nations whose shores were washed by the great Inland Sea, Carthage, Rome's major rival, had to be destroyed. "Cartago delenda est!" "Carthage must be destroyed!"

In God's overall strategy, there was another region that had to be destroyed: Sheol [known in the Greek-speaking world as "Hades"], the land of the souls that had departed this life. This destruction of Satan's stronghold had an important facet to it — a facet that has been either sorely ignored or completely misunderstood in the West, and that is why one hardly hears anything about it in Roman Catholic or Protestant circles; whereas, in the Orthodox Christian Church, it is very prominent, both in iconography and hymnology.

A recent study by Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev provides some important insights into this question. The bishop points out that, in Protestant circles, the event of Christ's Descent into Hades is largely ignored and unknown (which we also noted in our earlier article, "The Neutralization of the Netherworld"). At best, it is explained away in metaphorical terms.

Following the thought of Augustine and Aquinas, Roman Catholic interpreters, on their part, insist that Christ's descent into Hades had relevance only for the righteous of the Old Testament. Following faithfully in the footsteps of Latin scholars, many contemporary Orthodox Christians say the same.

But what did the *early* Church believe? *This* is the question that Bishop Hilarion addresses in his study, and the answers he discovers in the Church Fathers are, quite literally, Sheol-shattering, if you pardon the expression. This is of interest to us, not so much because of what Bishop Hilarion is saying, but because this is what our Church Fathers, our hymnography, our iconography, our Church Tradition, are saying.

Citing ancient Christian writers — such as Sts. Polycarp of Smyrna (+163) and Ignatius of Antioch (+107), *the Shepherd of Hermas* (c. A. D. 100), Melito of Sardis (+170), Clement of Alexandria (+220), Jacob Aphrahat (+345), Sts. Justin the Philosopher (+107), Hippolytus of Rome

(+236), Irenaeus of Lyons (+202), Athanasius the Great (+373), Basil the Great (+379), Gregory the Theologian (+391), Gregory of Nyssa (+395), John Chrysostom (+407), Cyril of Alexandria (+444), Ephraim the Syrian (+373), Maximus the Confessor (+662), and John of Damascus (+760) — Bishop Hilarion shows that these ancient authorities were virtually unanimous in teaching that Christ's descent into and destruction of the netherworld is *of universal and timeless significance*. In the writings of the ancient authors and Church Fathers, Adam is viewed as a symbol of the entire human race redeemed by Christ. Those who hear Christ's preaching and follow Him are, first, the righteous of the Old Testament and *then* all the others who respond to our Saviour's preaching. Whether or not all respond to Christ's preaching in Hades is an open question, but unlike later writers in the West, the consciousness of the Church in the East admitted the opportunity to be saved, not only to those who believed during their lifetime, but also to those who were not given the opportunity to believe, yet pleased God with their lofty morality, compassion for others, and good works, and thus, were *predisposed* to believe when they heard Christ.

Let us look at some examples of this Patristic thinking in the holy hymnography of our Church. One illustration comes from the Kontakia of St. Romanos the Melodist, who reposed around A. D. 556. In his *Third Kontakion on the Resurrection*, the Saint says the following:

### ***Strophe 8: Adam Speaks***

Now, Hades, you will recall my words, which I said to you a  
long time ago, 'My King is stronger than you.'

But you considered these words a dream.

Experience will teach you His force.

For it is not only I, but all my descendants,

And all men that you will lose;

you will be deprived of all.

The Christ whom you saw hanging on the Cross,

He will himself enchain you, and joyfully I shall reply

'Where, O Death, is your victory, and where your power?

God has destroyed your strength,

Through the Resurrection'."

### ***Strophe 9: Hades speaks***

"Just so, on the third day, the sea-monster disgorged  
Jonas. Now I disgorge Christ and all of those  
who are Christ's;  
Because of the race of Adam I am being chastised."  
Uttering these laments, Hades cried out with groans.  
"I did not believe Adam when he told me these things in  
advance; But I boasted and loudly proclaimed:  
'No one rules over me.'  
For formerly I was lord of all;  
But now I have lost all men\*, and taunting me,  
they say: 'Where, O Death, is your victory, and where your  
power? God has destroyed your strength,  
Through the Resurrection'."

Another example of this thought is expressed in a hymn by St. John of Damascus (+760):

Some say that [Christ delivered from Hades] only those  
who believed,  
Such as fathers and prophets,  
Judges and, with them, kings and rulers, and  
others of the Hebrew people,  
not numerous or known to many.

But we shall reply to those who think this  
that there is nothing marvelous or strange  
in Christ saving those who had believed;  
for He alone is the just Judge,  
and everyone who believes in Him shall not perish.

Wherefore, they all ought to have been saved

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\*By "all", we assume that St. Romanos means all in Hades who assent to Christ's teaching when He proclaims the glad tidings of His Resurrection. One might ask: which soul could possibly refuse to accept Christ's teaching? It seems quite possible that the soul of someone like Lenin, or Hitler, or Stalin, or of a number of some such individuals would react to Christ's teaching by saying, "Resurrection? Bah! Humbug! What utter nonsense! The opium of the masses!" In his *Homily on Christ's Descent into Hades*, St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (+403) says, "What then? Did God save absolutely all when He appeared in Hades? In no wise. But there also He saved them that believed." For the entire Homily, see *The Lamentations of Matins of Holy and Great Saturday, Holy Transfiguration Monastery*, Boston, 1981.

and delivered from the bonds of Hades  
by the descent of our God and Master;  
for this very thing came to pass by His foresight.

Whereas those who were saved only by His *philanthropía*  
[love for mankind] were, I think, all those  
Who had the purest life,  
and performed all manner of good works  
living in modesty, temperance  
yet, they had not grasped [or, apprehended — *Gr.*  
*katélavon*] the pure and divine Faith,  
because they had not been instructed in it,  
and remained altogether untutored.

They were those whom the Steward and Master of all  
drew and captured in His divine nets,  
and persuaded to believe in Him,  
illuminating them with His divine  
rays and showing them the True  
Light.

(*Concerning Those Who Died in Faith*, St. John of Damascus, PG. 95,  
257 AC)

Why did Augustine (and, following him, the entire West) veer away from this virtually unanimous teaching of the ancient Church? Augustine does not really explain himself in this matter. Some surmise that, since he had already consigned most of mankind to eternal damnation by his teachings of predestination and original sin, perhaps he felt that our Saviour's act of *philanthropía* toward the souls held captive in Hades was somehow — how can we say this delicately? — misplaced? In any case, Aquinas followed him faithfully, and added a few scholastic elements and novelties [like Purgatory], and — *viola!* — the Papacy's teaching drifted away from the doctrine of the early Church in this matter. The Protestants, on their part, inherited this variation, and made their own interpretations of it, and so we have what we have today in the West.

But, once again, let us examine the Holy Scriptures carefully:

When Jesus was entered into Capernaum there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented". And Jesus saith unto him, "I will come and heal him. "The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and

my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, 'Go', and he goeth; and to another, 'Come,' and he cometh; and to my servant, 'Do this'; and he doeth it." When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, *Amen, I say unto you. I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west and, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven. And Jesus said unto the centurion, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.*

(Matt. 8:5-13)

A certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of [Christ], and came and fell at His feet: The woman was a Greek, [i.e., a pagan], a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs: <sup>\*</sup> And she answered and said unto Him; Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs! And He said unto her, *For this saying go thy way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter.* And when she was come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter laying upon the bed.

(Mark 7:25-29)

When the heathen who have not the Law do by nature what the Law requires, they are a Law to themselves, even though they do not have the Law. *They show that what the Law requires is written on their hearts*, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

(Rom. 2:14-16)

But how are men to call upon [the Lord] in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom

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<sup>\*</sup>Actually, in the Greek text, our Saviour did not say "dogs" [*kýnos*], but *kynária*, i.e., little dogs, puppies. "Dogs" is a term of disdain; but "puppies" are something else altogether. Puppies are helpless, little creatures. So, the pagans are like puppies in spiritual understanding; they are not deserving of disdain, but of solicitude.



they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Esaias says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" *So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.*

(Rom. 10-14-17)

For Christ also hath once suffered for our sins. He, the just, suffered for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. In the body, He was put to death; in the spirit, He was brought to life. And in the spirit He went and preached to the spirits that were imprisoned [in Hades], *who formerly had not obeyed.*

(I Peter 3:18-20)

In the Holy Scriptures, in the mind of the Church Fathers, in the Orthodox Church's iconography and hymnology, the Descent into Hades is a vitally important event, foretold in the Old Testament, articulated in the New, and celebrated by the Saints.

*The end was swift and dramatic. Light flashed everywhere. Yelps, shrieks, squeals, and, yes, pandemonium.... The gates crashed with a din. The gate-keepers scrambled and high-tailed it. Shouts of, "Look, He's here! Last week, He snatched Lazarus, and now He's back! The fierce Man of War is back! Yahoo! Tell everyone the Good News! The Vanquisher of death is here! Hosanna and Hooray!!" And echoing everywhere, through the dank halls and vaults, and down the endless ages, again and again, the battle-cry reverberated: **"Sheol delenda est! Hades must be destroyed!!"***

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## **WE CELEBRATE PENTECOST**

As our Archdeacon Andrew is wont to say: "Of all the things that I've lost, what I miss the most is my mind."

Consequently, since the incident that I am about to relate took place one brain stroke and about fifty years ago, I cannot vouch for its absolute accuracy as far as the exact words that were used. However, the conversation recorded below was pretty much as it appears here.

One year, in the early 1960's, when I was a student at the theological school I attended, an eminent theologian came from Greece to give us a lecture about the role of the Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement and in the "World Council of Churches." He was, in fact, the official representative of the new calendar Church of Greece to the World Council of Churches, so obviously, he was a man of considerable importance and, one would hope, exceptional qualifications for the role he had to fulfill.

The whole student body gathered in the seminary's assembly hall to hear this important and eminent man. In the course of his lecture, he told us many and various interesting facts about the work of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland — none of which I can recall. The one thing which I do remember is one phrase which caught my immediate attention: "We Orthodox," he said, "have to reproach ourselves, because we *do not have a theology of the Holy Spirit.*"

As that phrase rolled over the gathered assembly of the seminary's professors and students, one student stood up at the back of the hall.

"Forgive me, Sir Professor," said the student. In those days, that was the proper form of address in Greek [*"Kýrie Kathiyitá"*] when a student had to speak to a professor. The student continued: "You said that we Orthodox have to reproach ourselves because we do not have a theology of the Holy Spirit" — as opposed to the Protestants who, presumably, *do*.

"Surely, Sir Professor, you must have attended church on the holy feast of Pentecost and listened to the hymnology [all of it taken from homilies of the Church Fathers], where the entire service is dedicated to the Holy Spirit's work, attributes and authority. Surely, you have been to church on the Monday of the Holy Spirit, where virtually the same service is repeated again. Surely, you must have heard of and read the work 'On the Holy Spirit,' by Saint Basil the Great."

How embarrassing! Our eminent "licensed theologian" was looking very foolish, and a young whipper-snapper of a student was demolishing his credibility right before our eyes!

The seminary's professors, who were sitting in the front row, turned together as a body and *glared* at the student, as if to say, "How *DARE* you?"

By the same token, of course, we, on our part, should have asked our professors, "How *DARE* you allow our Holy Faith to be ridiculed by this so-called theologian?"

In the meantime, our "eminent" theologian was standing speechless at the podium in front of the entire student body, with not a word to say in response to the student.

But as a matter of fact, what *do* the hymns of Holy Pentecost teach us about the Holy Spirit?

Here is a sampling from Vespers and the Praises of Matins:

We celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit, and the time appointed for the promise, and the fulfillment of hope. How great is this mystery: it is both exceeding great and most venerable. Wherefore, we cry unto Thee: O Creator of all, Lord, glory be to Thee.

The Holy Spirit provideth all things: He gushed forth prophecy; He perfecteth the priesthood; He hath taught wisdom to the illiterate. He hath shown forth the fishermen as theologians. He holdeth together the whole institution of the Church. Wherefore, O Comforter, one in essence and throne with the Father and the Son, glory be to Thee.

The Holy Spirit hath ever been, and is, and shall be, neither beginning nor ending; but He is ever ranked and numbered together with the Father and the Son. He is Life, and life-creating; Light, and light-bestowing; by nature good, and the source of goodness; through Him the Father is known, and the Son is glorified; and thereby all men acknowledge a single sovereignty, single covenant, one adoration of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is Light and Life, and a living, noetic Fountain, a Spirit of wisdom, a Spirit of understanding; a good, an upright, a noetic Spirit, presiding in power and purging offences. He is God, and doth deify; He is Fire, issuing from Fire, speaking, working, distributing the gifts; through Whom all the Prophets, and all the Martyrs received their crowns. Strange is this report, strange and new this sight, a Fire divided that these gifts may be apportioned.\*

All of these hymns are based on the work *On the Holy Spirit*, by Saint Basil the Great, and a sermon by Saint Gregory the Theologian entitled, *On Pentecost*.

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\*Copyright, 1990, The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston.

Tsk, tsk. Too bad we Orthodox Christians do not have a theology of the Holy Spirit.....

— An Important Footnote —

Actually, what our licensed theologian should have said is this: "We Orthodox have to reproach ourselves, because, although we have such a profound and readily accessible theology of the Holy Spirit, we have not taken the trouble to pay heed to it, or to apply it to our lives."

Now, *that* would have really impressed and reproached us.

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### THE THREE LEVELS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Recently, someone asked me to write a Catechism of the Orthodox Church. However, I am reluctant to undertake such a project, because, number one, I find catechisms very boring, and, number two, I wouldn't know where to begin.

The best method of catechizing new Christians, I think, is the method explained to Father Panteleimon, the founder of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, MA, by his Elder, Father Joseph the Cave-dweller, of the Holy Mountain, Athos.

Many people in our Church have heard about the Elder Joseph's "method." But it might be a good idea to explain it in writing too, because, if it is written, people will find it easier to remember. Actually, the idea did not originate with the Elder Joseph. Very simply, it is the way the Church has taught its people [and clergy]\* since the very beginning.

Essentially, it is this:

*The First Level of Christian Education* is the Lives of the Saints [this includes the Old Testament saints]. From the Lives of the Saints you will learn about Christian morality, Christian doctrine, Church History, Christian apologetics, etc. In many ways, the Lives of the Saints are a continuation of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and they are written in the same narrative style as the Acts of the Apostles. For example, if you read the Life of Saint Athanasius the Great, you will learn about the whole Arian controversy and what the Arians said against the Orthodox, and how the

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\*Seminaries are a Roman Catholic invention of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

Orthodox responded to the Arians. You will learn what Church councils took place; you will learn about the exiles the Saint suffered. To be brief, you have learned all sorts of information just by reading this one Life of St. Athanasius the Great.

In the old days, before electricity, or radio, or television, families would gather in their parlors, and the member of the family who could read would sit near the lamplight or candlelight and read the Lives of the day for the rest of the family, year after year. So, by the time you were twenty or twenty-five, you had heard each Life several times, and you pretty well knew them all almost by heart. Therefore,

if, in the morning on the next day, a Turk, or an unbeliever, or a Protestant missionary, or a Jewish rabbi, or a Jesuit, or a zealous Communist confronted you and said something against your Orthodox Christian faith, you would know how to respond to him in an appropriate manner. Why? Because you had read or heard the Lives of the Saints all those years, and knew what to say. You would not be intimidated or at a loss for words. You had graduated from the Elementary (or Primary) School of Christian Education.

*The Second Level of Christian Education* is, so to speak, the High School for Christians. Now we begin studying the Holy Scriptures, *together with the interpretations of the Holy Fathers.*

Someone will object: "What? Are you telling me, Your Eminence, that we don't begin with the Holy Scriptures?"

Yes, we are *not* beginning with the Holy Scriptures. Why? Because the Gospels [especially the Gospel of Saint John] are more difficult to understand, and on a higher level, than the Lives of the Saints. So the Holy Scriptures come later in our educational system. First, we start with the simpler things, like the Lives of the Saints — which, of course, are permeated with the Gospel of Christ and its words — and then we progress to the more complicated and more advanced things, like the teachings of our Saviour. Of course, in our Saviour's teachings there are many parables and miracles that are appropriate for the First Level also. But, generally speaking, since we Orthodox Christians do not believe in the private interpretation of the Scriptures, we need the interpretations of the Holy Fathers for the Scriptures, so that we will understand the Scriptures *correctly* — especially when it comes to understanding loftier things like our Saviour's redemptive work, or His relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

At this point, it is important to add that our attendance at the holy services — especially Vespers and Matins — is very important. All the prayers and hymns are filled with instruction and examples from the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints celebrated every day. They are suitable both for beginners and for the more advanced [as the previous article, "We Celebrate Pentecost" pointed out].

*The Third Level of Christian Education.* If the Lives of the Saints were the elementary school, and the Holy Scriptures [with the commentaries of the Holy Fathers] were the high school, then this next level is the university. This is for the spiritually advanced. Here, we are talking about the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the *Philokalia*, the *Homilies of Saint Isaac of Syria*, etc.

Of course, everybody wants to be the "champ"; everybody wants to be the beauty queen. Everybody wants to go right to the top, right away. We all have seen those bumper stickers: "O God, give me patience — right now!"

However, it doesn't work that way for most of us.

Most of us have to begin at the bottom and slowly work our way up.

So, the Third Level of Christian Education — the university level — is not for everyone, and most especially *not* for the new converts to the Orthodox Christian faith. First, we have to learn the basics — how to count to ten, etc. Then comes the addition, the subtraction and long division; then the algebra and geometry, and finally the physics.

Every school system depends on good teachers. In the Orthodox Church, we have excellent elementary school teachers: our grandmothers. (In the higher levels, our priests and spiritual fathers take over.) So if, perchance, you do not have an Orthodox grandmother in your church, kidnap one from the neighboring parish.

If you add the church services and hymnology to these Three Levels of Christian Education, then, humanly speaking, you have a complete theological course of studies. Beyond this, all you need to become a Church Father is divine illumination.

But if you are looking for a good catechism, the "Method" outlined by the Elder Joseph the Cave-dweller will suffice.

After I described the Three Levels of Christian Education to one group, somebody asked me if the Orthodox Church had anything for pre-

schoolers. The answer is: Yes! If you are unable to read the Lives of the Saints in full on a daily basis, then you can go to *The Great Horologion* (published by Holy Transfiguration in Brookline, Massachusetts). There you will find short Lives of the major saints of the day. You will also find short narrations describing the Major Feasts, and also the feasts of the Triodion and Pentecostarion seasons.

Now you have your Catechism, and no more excuses.

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## **NOT LICENSED THEOLOGIANS**

### **— The Firing Squad —**

Some fifty years ago, when I was a student at the theological academy, our professor of Dogmatics, Father John Romanides, told us a story about *his* student days at the Theological School of the University of Athens.

In order to obtain his doctorate from the University, Father John, a newly ordained priest at that time [the 1950's], had to defend his dissertation before a panel of theological professors. The subject of his dissertation was "The Ancestral Sin" [meaning the sin of our ancestors, Adam and Eve; this is sometimes mistranslated into English as "the Original Sin"].

As various questions about his dissertation were being fired at him from the professors [all of whom had received their credentials at Roman Catholic or Protestant universities in Europe], Father John answered to the best of his considerable ability. Finally, the head of the theological department, the big gun himself, Dr. Panayiotes Trembelas, took aim at Father John, who, as is customary in these interrogations, was standing before the panel of seated professors.

"You have many citations in your dissertation from the writings of Symeon the New Theologian," said Dr. Trembelas.

"That is correct, Sir Professor," answered Father John, with the proper deference.

"You must delete them," continued Dr. Trembelas. "Symeon cannot be

cited as a source in your work, because he never received a theological degree."

[Yes, you just read the foregoing sentence correctly.]

Without batting an eyelash at Trembelas' unbelievable remark, Father John answered calmly, "Very well, as you say, Sir Professor. Would you want me to delete also all my references to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the Evangelists, since they, too, never received a theological degree? They, too, were not licensed theologians."

Stifled laughter could be heard coming from the panel of distinguished professors.

### **— The Latin Captivity —**

Sadly, Trembelas' unfortunate remark was solid proof of an ailment that had long been, and still is, afflicting "Orthodox" theological schools. This ailment is known as "the Latin Captivity" — a history of some 200 years wherein the academic, scholastic, and pedantic "theology" [or more correctly, rationalism] of the West has carpeted the theological academies of the East like a big, wet, and cold blanket. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, Father George Florovsky and Father John Romanides complained about this spiritual plague repeatedly in their writings. In some places in Russia and Ukraine, this "Captivity" was so pervasive that even the theological lectures in "Orthodox" seminaries were given in Latin. On occasion, in these lands, seminarians were obliged to *preach* in Latin in the parishes! [Imagine the poor *bábushki* — the little grandmothers — who had to stand through this....]

With this in mind, one can begin to understand why "World Orthodoxy's" religious leaders today are so eager to unite with the non-Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement. Just consider for a moment: if you believed that the Orthodox Church was so impoverished theologically that it did not even have a theology of the Holy Spirit [see my article, "We Celebrate Pentecost"], or had saints that were lacking in theological degrees and were not "licensed theologians"(!!), then you too would certainly feel attracted to other religious affiliations.

The Church has its traditional method of preparing its clergy, and this method has worked well for many centuries, even before seminaries were invented in the seventeenth century. As we have mentioned on other occasions, Father George Florovsky, one of the most prominent Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, never attended a theological



academy as a student. His theological education was drawn *solely* from the sacred services. And, if you are going to be serious as a student of theology, then you can go on to "graduate studies," such as those described in the Dismissal Hymn for monastic saints: "By fasting, vigil and prayer thou didst obtain heavenly gifts" — like Saint Symeon the New Theologian (despite the fact that, according to Dr. Panayiotis Trembelas, the saint was not a "licensed theologian").

Unfortunately, the "Latin Captivity" is still very much in effect [one "Orthodox" seminary here in America even had a Roman Catholic clergyman teaching a course in the Church Fathers until recently; another "Orthodox" seminary in America has Roman Catholics on its Board of Directors]. Hence, "World Orthodoxy's" eager involvement in the Ecumenical Movement. One thing inexorably leads to another.

### **— The School of the Holy Spirit —**

But, thank God! Orthodoxy still prevails in our hymnology and in the church services, and in the hearts of many of our clergy and faithful.

What, for instance, does the Dismissal Hymn of Pentecost teach us?

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast shown forth the fishermen as supremely wise, by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit.

Oh!

So, *that's* where Matthew, Mark, Luke and John got their theological degrees! From the School of the Holy Spirit.

I *knew* that Divine Grace was somehow involved in all this. No *wonder* we call our saints "God-inspired" and "God-bearing"! No *wonder* we run to them for healing of soul and body! No *wonder* we venerate their holy relics, and celebrate their memories, and ask for their intercessions! No *wonder* we revere people like Saint John of Kronstadt, and Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis, and the Prophet Elias, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov, and even Saint Symeon the New Theologian [even though he never got his theological degree from the university]!

### **— An Unimportant Footnote —**

Some years ago, before I was ordained, I was going for a walk with one

of the fathers at our Monastery in Brookline, Mass.

"So, you are a licensed theologian?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know. That's what they told me."

"So, what do you do with your license?" he asked again.

I thought for a few moments, and finally said, "Well, I try to make sure I'm wearing it when I go for a walk. That way, at least, I know that I won't be picked up by the dog pound."

### **— A Footnote of Some Importance —**

There is a place in the Orthodox Church for theological "academies." However, they must be planned properly, with prayer and a lot of discretion. No educational system is foolproof, but if adhered to carefully, the Orthodox Church's "Three Levels of Christian Education," [see my previous article] are almost the perfect guideline for such a system. More on this later.

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## **THE TRIP TO NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Or

On Avoiding Aptitudinal Extensions  
and Other Frivolities

— Part One —

### **Defining the Indefinable**

In a previous article, we mentioned the "Latin Captivity." We noted that, in certain Orthodox countries, even the lectures given in the seminaries were in Latin and, on occasion, seminarians were obliged to preach in Latin to Orthodox congregations that normally spoke just Russian or Ukrainian.

If our problems were limited to the use of Latin, we would be in great shape. But, alas! the problem was not with the Latin language. The problem lay in the Roman Catholic scholastic "theology" that was introduced *via* the Latin language. The rationalistic "theology" of the West had, from many centuries before, begun to introduce new words that

reflected the West's slippage from the Orthodox Christian faith, which ended with the West's dependence on human reason in order to "define" the indefinable mysteries of God.

For example, the scholastic term "transubstantiation" was a newly invented Roman Catholic word\* which attempted to explain "in a manner agreeable to human reason whatever is apparently supernatural"\*\* in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, wherein the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

### **Frivolities and Quackeries**

In order to give our Orthodox Christian believers a small sample of the convoluted philosophical reasoning used by the Scholastics to "explain" what takes place in the Eucharist, we quote *verbatim* the following entry in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1909 Edition, p. 583) for the word "Eucharist":

The simplest [*sic*] treatment of the subject is that offered by the Schoolmen [i.e. the Scholastics], especially St. Thomas [Aquinas] (III, Q, 1xxvi, a. 4). They reduced the mode of being to the mode of becoming, i. e. they traced back the mode of existence peculiar to the Eucharistic Body to the Transubstantiation; for a thing has to so "be" as it was in "becoming". Since *ex vi verborum* the immediate result is the presence of the Body of Christ, its quantity, present merely *per concomitantiam*, must follow the mode of existence peculiar to its substance, and, like the latter, must exist without division and extension, i. e. entirely in the whole Host and entirely in each part thereof. In other words, the Body of Christ is present in the sacrament, not after the manner of "quantity" (*per modum quantitatis*), but of "substance" (*per modum substantiae*). *Later Scholasticism* (Bellarmine, Suarez, Billuart, and others) tried to improve upon this explanation along other lines by distinguishing between internal and external quantity. By internal quantity (*quantitas interna seu in actu primo*) is understood that entity, by virtue of which a corporeal substance merely possesses "aptitudinal extension", i. e. the "capability" of being extended in tri-dimensional space. External quantity, on the other hand (*quantitas externa seu in*

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\*It was first used in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

\*\*This is the definition of "rationalism" found in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1962, p. 1660.

*actu secundo*), is the same entity, but in so far as it follows its natural tendency to occupy space and actually extends itself in the three dimensions. While aptitudinal extension or internal quantity is so bound up with the essences of bodies that its separability from them involves a metaphysical contradiction, external quantity is, on the other hand, only a natural consequence and effect, which can be so suspended and withheld by the First Cause, that the corporeal substance, retaining its internal quantity, does not extend itself into space.

The last time I saw this much convolution was when I visited a pretzel factory near Lancaster, Pennsylvania many years ago.

As anyone can see, the "explanation" given above might as well have been completely in Latin. And, the upshot is that the editors of the *Encyclopedia* finally admit that, when speaking about the Eucharist, they are "face to face with a great mystery"!!

(You mean, this Mystery is the sort of thing even a licensed theologian cannot solve? Be still, my heart!)

Truly, as Saint Paul says, "the world by [human] wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). What the Scholastics call "arguments and speculations," Saint Gregory the Theologian calls "frivolities and quackeries" (*First Theological Oration: vii*).

### **Baggage Problems**

Since this divine mystery *cannot* be explained, the Orthodox Church has never attempted to do so. So, when the Saints of the Church speak about the Eucharist, they say only that a "change" takes place. How, or in what manner the change takes place, nobody can say. Or define. A mystery is, by definition, a mystery.

But when the "Latin Captivity" spread to the East, Western rationalism followed. Although Latin is a sonorous language, it carries a lot of baggage nowadays. And a great deal of that scholastic baggage (see *The Catholic Encyclopedia* above) was translated into the languages of the Orthodox countries where the Latin Captivity prevailed. So, for example, "transubstantiation" became "*metousiosis*" in the Greek-speaking churches. The same happened in Russia, in Romania, in Georgia, etc.

Which brings us to my trip to New Hampshire in 1962.

## **"The Russian Sect"**

My seminary professor of Dogmatics, Father John Romanides, asked me if I would be his chanter at a Liturgy that was to be held in a little New Hampshire town, whose name I cannot now remember. Father George Florovsky was to accompany Father John on this trip and give a brief lecture on the recent World Council of Churches General Assembly in New Delhi, India.

As we drove along a two-lane road through the New England countryside to get to the church, Father John was the driver and Father George sat next to him in the passenger seat. I, a mere youth of twenty-three years, sat in the back seat, all starry-eyed and stupefied that I was in the same car with these two prominent men.

At one point (I still don't know what got into me), I leaned forward, and said, "Father George, yesterday in our class in Patrology,<sup>\*</sup> we were told that, in Russia, the correct theological term for what takes place in the Holy Eucharist was 'transubstantiation,' but that some sect in Russia insisted on using the term 'change.'"

The car almost careened off the road.

After Father John had regained control of the vehicle, he turned, still laughing, to Father George and said, "Father George, can you tell us the name of that Russian sect?"

Father George just smiled and sort of grunted.

## **Not A Laughing Matter**

Maybe we should have been weeping. Thanks to the Latin Captivity, the ancient teaching of the Orthodox Church had been pre-

sented as the "terminology of a Russian sect" in an "Orthodox" Patrology class in an "Orthodox" seminary.

To paraphrase Psalm 136, "How could we sing the Lord's song in the strange land of this Captivity?"

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<sup>\*</sup>The professor of Patrology shall remain unnamed.

## THE TRIP TO NEW HAMPSHIRE

Or  
His Eminence Rules the Waves

—Part Two —

Have you heard the one about the tug-of-war between the Pope of Rome and the Greek Archbishop?

See? You're probably smiling already.

But, first, however, let me tell you about what happened next during our trip to New Hampshire.

After we arrived at the church, Father George Florovsky and Father George Romanides began their preparations to serve the Divine Liturgy. In the meantime, I was making my last minute check to make sure everything was in order at the chanting stand.

The Liturgy completed, the ladies' auxiliary began the final preparations for the meal for all the faithful in attendance. While we were waiting for these preparations to end, Father George decided to take a little walk in the open, grass-covered area next to the dining hall. I asked him if I could join him, and he readily consented.

Since the jurisdictional disputes among the new calendar Greek Archdiocese, the "Metropolia" (as it was called then; now it is known as the Orthodox Church in America), the Syrian Archdiocese, etc. were the common topic of discussion in new calendar Orthodox circles in America, I asked Father George, "Father George, how can we Orthodox object to the Roman Pope's claims of jurisdiction over the whole world, when we have an Archbishop [i.e. the late new calendar Archbishop Iakovos] who claims jurisdiction over *more than half* the world?"

Father George's response was terse and to the point: "Indeed."

When one sees this tendency toward inflated and grandiose episcopal titles in contemporary "Orthodoxy," is this another symptom of the "Latin Captivity"?

"Moscow and All Russia," "Athens and All Greece," and the awesome and dread:

"Archbishop of North and South America, and Super-

latively-Honored\* Exarch of both the Atlantic and the Pacific."

Yes, it is true — there was a time when the sun never set on the Greek Archdiocese.

*This* is the tug-of-war story that I promised to tell you earlier. But, alas! it is no joke. In Archbishop Iakovos' time, this was his official title. As someone quipped at the time, "Even the fish at sea didn't get away!"

In more recent times, thank God, the ecumenistically-minded Greek bishops of our hemisphere have tempered their claims and titles. But the power struggles continue between Moscow and Constantinople. Where will it all end, and where is this heading in the years to come? As science expands our physical boundaries in the years ahead, will we be hearing things like:

"His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch of New Rome and the Entire Universe, and All Probable and Improbable Parallel Universes"??

In his book, *Against False Union*, author Alexander Kalomiros says the following in his wonderful chapter on Ecclesiology:

Let no one think that the Papacy is something which exists only in the West. In recent times it has started to appear among the Orthodox too. A few novel titles are characteristic of this spirit, for example, "Archbishop of all Greece," "Archbishop of North and South America." Many times we hear people say of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the "leader of Orthodoxy," or we hear the Russians speaking of Moscow as the third Rome and its patriarch as holding the reins of the whole of Orthodoxy. In fact, many sharp rivalries have begun. All these are manifestations of the same worldly spirit, the same thirst for worldly power, and belong to the same tendencies which characterize the world today.

As someone once said, "Christ placed the Church into the world in order to save the world; but Satan is always trying to place the world into the Church in order to destroy the Church." Evidently, in some quarters, his tactic is succeeding.

The Saints of our Church also have something to say about what needs to be done about these worldly tendencies in our fallen, human nature.

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\*In Greek, *Ypértimos Éxarchos*. The Greek text has particles, which serve as intensifiers.

For example, the one theme that runs throughout the whole of Saint John Chrysostom's work, *On the Priesthood*, is this: Those who find themselves in positions of authority must follow Christ's example and teaching. That is, they must rule through self-sacrificial love and servanthood, acknowledging their own submission to those over whom they rule.

On his part, Saint Isaac of Syria, in his *Ascetical Homilies*, has this to say:

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness and limits, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, the beginning of all goodness.

(Homily Eight)

If the ecumenist bishops aspire to mimic the Pope of Rome, they should, at least, appropriate for [and *apply to*] themselves one of the Pope's really edifying titles: "the servant of the servants of God."

This, plus being truly Orthodox, would certainly help the "Orthodox" get back on track.

But, alas!, in "World Orthodoxy," the contentions for power grow, while the struggles for Orthodoxy wither. No wonder they now openly declare themselves and the Papacy to be: "Sister Churches".

The "Latin Captivity" lives on....

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## **THE TRIP TO NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Or

"Our Beloved Archbishop"  
Is Not Amused

— Part Three —

After all these years, I think back on that time when I had the opportunity to be with Father George Romanides and Father George Florovsky on that trip to New Hampshire, and I marvel at what a wonderful learning experience it was for me. I'm still starry-eyed and stupefied. (But now, to tell the truth, it's probably because of my stroke).



As I recounted in the last installment of this series of articles, the preparations for the meal after the Divine Liturgy were in the process of being completed. These preparations were finished and we all sat down to a delicious banquet prepared by the parish sisterhood.

Then it was time for Father George's talk on the recent General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi.

Father George spoke at some length about the role of the Orthodox Church in these ecumenical assemblies. He emphasized, as he usually did, that we were there only to bear witness to the fact that we, indeed, are the Church that Christ founded, and that is why the Orthodox Church's delegation had *always* issued a "Separate Statement" at the end of each previous General Assembly of these ecumenical gatherings. Aside from these details, however, I must admit that time has obliterated from my memory the bulk of what he said at that gathering so many decades ago.

There is one incident, however, that stands out very distinctly in my mind.

At the Question and Answer session after Father George's talk, one lady arose and addressed Father George as follows, with some indignation:

"Father George, I understand that our Ecumenical Patriarch [Athenagoras] made it quite clear that there was to be *no* 'Separate Statement' issued by the Orthodox delegation at the General Assembly this time. Yet, despite this, a 'Separate Statement' was nonetheless issued — *despite*, I repeat, the Ecumenical Patriarch's wishes, and *despite* the fact that our beloved Archbishop Iakovos reportedly became *very* upset and *very* angry at the Orthodox delegation in New Delhi over this matter. Can you tell us who was responsible for this 'Separate Statement'?"

"Yes, I can," answered Father George very meekly. "I was."

Everyone burst into laughter, as the poor woman who had asked the question turned beet red from embarrassment.

Others, however, who were higher in "World Orthodoxy's" ruling echelons, were not amused.

### **—The Axe Falls—**

1] Father George was never again a member of an Orthodox delegation

at any General Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

2]A "Separate Statement" was never again issued by the "Orthodox" at any future General Assembly.

3]Father George was dismissed from the faculty of our "Orthodox" seminary.

4]At that time, and in the months that followed, the seminary dean, Father Archimandrite Panteleimon Rodopoulos, Father John Romanides, and others, resigned from the faculty of the same seminary in protest over the unjust dismissal of Father George Florovsky.

In retrospect, these developments seem almost inevitable.

How could it be otherwise?

The "Orthodox" bishops who had been trained in non-Orthodox institutions felt more affinity with their "licensed theologian" friends and colleagues in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism than they did with traditional Orthodox Christianity. They spoke the same language (rationalism), sought the same "degrees in theology", and had the same instructors; hence, Ecumenism was inevitable.

### **— The Right Direction —**

We loved Father John Romanides and Father George Florovsky because they pointed us in the right direction, and gave us the correct principles to go by. But for reasons known to themselves, they did not follow through on those principles.

What are those principles?

The Definition of the Fourth Ecumenical Council tells us:

We follow in the footsteps of the Holy Fathers.

Father George and Father John, like others, felt that they could fight the system "from within." But what actually happened was that they found they could not win that fight.

We are grateful, at least, for all the good things we learned from them.

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